

**Honorary Doctorate and
Convocation Address**

Tom Mitchell

**President and CEO
Ontario Power Generation**

**University of Ontario Institute of Technology
2012 Graduation Ceremonies
Faculties of: Business and Information Technology; Energy Systems and Nuclear Science; and
Science**

June 8, 2012

Oshawa, Ontario

Subject to change upon delivery

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to the
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NOTES FOR REMARKS

Well what can I say?

This is such a great honour.

Not only to be recognized by this outstanding institution ...

But to receive that recognition before this incredible assembly of bright and talented young women and men....

They say the face of youth is the face of the future.

And as I look at all of you today ...

... and reflect on your achievements ...

... I know the future of our society and province and country is in good hands.

And I want to take a moment to acknowledge the people ultimately responsible for my optimism; they're your parents, friends and family members who are here today witnessing your success.

If you remember anything I say today, remember this.

You are here because of them.

Yes, you did the work, and you made it happen.

But they did something equally significant.

They made **you** happen.

Their genes ... their example ... their support – and a lot of times – their money....

But most important, it was their love and faith and belief in you – and their desire to give you a good life – that helped bring you here today.

For that we owe them a huge debt of gratitude.

And if I may, I'd like to acknowledge one particular parent who's in the audience.

And that is my mother.

She is over 80 years young.

She flew in Wednesday from the States.

And I will tell you ... **she** is the reason – along with my late father – that I’m here today talking to you in this capacity.

Whatever I am, I owe a big part of it to them.

So yes, we owe our parents a lot.

We also owe our spouses and partners a lot.

Linda, my wife and life-partner of 35 years ... a big thanks to you too.

I suspect many of you may be wondering if you’ll continue to be as successful in the “real” world as you were here at UOIT.

I don’t blame you for thinking that.

When I graduated, good jobs were plentiful.

For many of you, the landscape is much different.

Instead of immediate access to employment, many of you may be wondering: “Will I even get a job?”

You may also have large student debts to pay off.

Not to mention the fear of having to perhaps live with your parents for an extended period after graduation.

I can tell by the look on their faces that they’re afraid of this too.

But before you get too caught up in these anxieties, listen

Don’t dwell on them.

You’re all incredibly smart.

You’re resourceful.

You’re focused.

You’re committed.

You have dreams.

On top of that, you’re graduating from one of the best technical schools in the country ...

... with one of the best faculties of its kind in the country.

With these strengths – no matter what it’s like out there now – all of you will ultimately be successful.

I’m convinced of that.

The key is to have faith in yourself.

Work hard. Because as my father used to say – the harder you work, the luckier you will get ... and it’s true!

And don't settle.

Set your goals high. You'll be amazed at what you can achieve – if you make the commitment.

Better yet, visualise your goals.

Make them real in your mind's eye – so that you can almost touch them.

Trust me. The more tangible your dreams are, the more likely you will make them happen.

Above all, never – ever – take “no” for an answer.

Be persistent.

Be positive.

Too many people give up on their dreams because they occasionally might become discouraged, disillusioned or even cynical.

Avoid these emotions like the plague.

Let me give you a secret to happiness.

Define your own version of success – one that matches your own passions and dreams – and be the master of your own destiny.

Stay the course ... and you **will** get there.

The big question is what happens once you **do** get there.

What kind of person will you be?

What kind of a person do you want to be?

These questions are far more fundamental than the pursuit of mere career success.

And they are much harder to answer.

But let me try.

We live in a world where the temptation to become self-absorbed is great.

Self-absorbed by our careers ...

Self-absorbed by the pressures we face ...

Self-absorbed even by our leisure activities ...

iPods ... iTunes ... Smart phones ... NetFlix ... Facebook ... LinkedIn ... Starbucks ... the list is long.

These and similar services give us the power to tailor almost anything to our own unique preferences and desires

That's not a bad thing.

But given this reality, it's easier than ever to live a life that is insular ...

... a life that exposes you **only** to people similar to yourself and **only** to experiences that you're comfortable with.

Don't fall into this trap.

As you build your careers, take the time – as often as possible -- to step out of your comfort zone.

Broaden yourself.

Strive to be multi-dimensional.

I don't care how you do it. Just do it.

If you're an engineer and love calculus, read Shakespeare.

If you feel like pizza, order sushi.

If you've never walked on a factory floor, do it.

If you're a liberal, make friends with a conservative ... and *vice versa*. It won't hurt you.

Going against the grain like this not only rounds you out as a human being.

It might even help you realize your dreams.

Steve Jobs liked to talk about how, as a young person, he developed a passion for calligraphy ... and how this influenced his great sense of design.

So don't be afraid to push yourself to develop interests and passions outside your job and career.

You never know what impact they will have.

But what's even more important ... and even more critical to your future ... is this.

Don't neglect to broaden and strengthen the bonds you have with people.

I like to listen to rock 'n' roll music.

One of my favorite groups is *Chicago*.

There's a great line in one of their songs from the 1970s that asks the question (Don't worry ... I won't sing it):

"When it's time to function as a feeling human being, will your bachelor of arts degree help you get by?"

I know UOIT is a technology institution.

But that lyric still applies.

How are you going to use your degrees – and your lives – to make a difference?

What are you going to do that matters?

We can start by reminding ourselves how incredibly lucky we are to live in a country like Canada.

I know.

I've lived in, and travelled to many, many places in my life. And this nation has few equals.

All of us could have ended up – either by birth or chance or circumstance – in a hundred other countries.

These are the places where most people in the world live.

They are also often the places where violence, disease and poverty are all too common.

And yet here **we** are, in Canada.

I think we won the lottery.

And so despite challenges like a tough job market and high student loans, you're still way ahead of the game.

So what do we do with our good fortune?

I do believe we are here for a reason.

The world needs skills, passion, energy ... and dreams.

Because it's not just about building a rewarding career ... achieving financial security ... owning a home ... or even enjoying that occasional Starbucks.

These things are important and valid ... and you are right to strive for them if you choose.

But there is more that matters.

Service matters.

Character matters.

Community matters.

Your province and your country matter.

Family, friends and the people you work with matter.

Compassion matters.

Love matters.

And finally, in a society that we hear is becoming increasingly polarized – between elites and non-elites, between city and suburbs, between East and West, between the one per cent and the 99 per cent – remember this.

Remember that justice and equity and reason and fairness also matter.

These are the things that make us **fully** human.

These are the things that all of you by virtue of your good fortune and talent are called upon – **called upon** – to pursue, advance and dedicate yourself to.

Do that and you will not just succeed.

You can – and you will – change the world.

Congratulations ... and good luck.